

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Program
Foreign Service Spouse Series

PATRICIA QUINN BARBIS

Interviewed by: Monique Wong

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Q: This is Monique Wong on December 1st, 1992. I'm interviewing Mrs. Patricia Quinn Barbis at her home in Bethesda, Maryland. This is Tape I, Side A. Mrs. Barbis, I'm going to cut out the pleasantries and ask you right away about this infamous telegram that you received after your first tour as a USIA officer. Could you perhaps read this to me and tell me what that was all about?

BARBIS: All right. I was in the Foreign Service both as a single person and as a married person, so I was Patricia Quinn as a single person and married a Foreign Service officer that I met at my first post at the American Embassy in Seoul, Korea. I had gone into the Foreign Service from my home in Seattle, Washington. At the university I majored in political science/international relations. However, I remember that I was discouraged from sitting for the Foreign Service exam. Women didn't do that then though I was a pretty strong student, but I still remained interested in the Foreign Service and I was interviewed by the Department of State and offered a position in Seattle in their security office. I was told that if I worked there for a while I could transfer overseas and that that would be a pathway for a woman to go in.

So by that time I also had figured out that my interests were very much in the area of cultural affairs and I learned about USIA rather than strictly FSO and State Department. So I did go into USIA, though I believe I wasOh, also, we were told to be recruited as a secretary and then you take exams. In fact USIA had a program, Junior Officer Training. And so I came back to Washington and went through a training program and was assigned in Phnom Penh, Cambodia and thought I was going. And for some reason at the last minute, they changed it to Seoul, Korea.

And I actually went in a secretarial capacity in the Cultural Office. I was an assistant, but from the beginning I did junior officer work. I was in charge of the educational exchange program. During my two-year tour there I had first a double promotion and a single promotion and was made a junior officer at that time. I think they called it Cultural Affairs Assistant. I've forgotten the exact language. Anyway, I finished my two-year tour.

Q: That was in 1957 when you finished?

BARBIS: Yes. I had met my husband his last six months of a tour and my first six months. In fact he came to Korea the day the Embassy moved from Pusan back to Seoul, so this was not too long after the Korean War and families were not permitted, so we were just a very small number. Four or five single women at this post. It was a difficult post, but I taught one day a week at Ewon Women's University and the cultural attaché^{1/2} that I worked for was totally enthusiastic about understanding the culture. I studied the Korean language with a nun every morning. I remember sometimes I had to pour boiling water in the key to open the door of the car because of course our cars were parked outside and it was so bitterly cold. So it was a very interesting experience. I was very enthusiastic about the Foreign Service.

When I left, I believe I was assigned to Saigon. I decided that I would go back around the world. It wasn't too usual. I had actually planned to travel with another young woman who came down with mononucleosis at the last minute. I decided not to cancel my trip, so in 1957, I went back to the United States through Asia and India and the Middle East and had a few experiences, but it was interesting. When I did get back to Washington, I was kept in Washington at USIA in the office of the Head of USIA and went to Seattle on home leave. My husband-to-be followed me and two weeks before I was to go to Saigon, we decided to get married.

He was with the Department of State and someone who knew both of us and knew that he had gone to Seattle called the Far East personnel officer, the gentleman who signed this telegram, Mr. Russell Cox, Chief, Far East Personnel, and said, "You know I think they're in Seattle getting married." I had sent a telegram saying I couldn't report to Saigon but I would be back in Washington within two weeks and I would like to discuss my future assignment.

So the telegram reads: "Letter August 22 received. Saigon assignment cancelled. Understand you married while on leave. If so, forward resignation immediately. Effective date prior marriage. Travel orders return Washington cancelled. Home leave must be repaid Agency per regulations."

Q: That was a pretty harsh telegram.

BARBIS: That was a very harsh telegram. I thought it was quite inappropriate. It is true in those days when we signed up for the Foreign Service we agreed that we would be available for world-wide assignment. And of course if you wanted to stay with a person to whom you were married, you were not really available for world-wide assignment.

Q: But presumably that would apply to your husband as well.

BARBIS: Yes, exactly. He was on the Korean Desk at the time and had another year or so before being re-assigned overseas. I thought it was a rather nasty telegram myself. Service in Korea had been extremely difficult. Quite a few people could not adjust to the difficulties of serving there and this is men and adults. In fact, in working with universities and educational exchange programs there, we had visiting professors, and at least one visiting professor that I remember had a mental breakdown and left. Was unable to cope with surviving there even on a temporary basis.

Q: Because it was at a very tough time?

BARBIS: Yes. We went to visit there and they were very serious. You wore a yellow armband and if your band even slipped, you were told that you could be shot. It was quite a challenging time. So to have done that service, to have done it successfully and in my case, which was against the way things were developing, very few people have, without influence, strictly, I feel, on merit, had a double and a single promotion in a single two-year tour. And then to be told you're expendable. It's worth nothing because you did something so brazen as to get married was pretty amazing.

The way I handled it - As it turned out in later years we found out that there was nothing really written down. They had just told us that if you marry in the Foreign Service, you must offer your resignation. So I did offer my resignation, but because I was somewhat well-known at that time - I think they called it IES, International Educational-Cultural Service in Washington was within the State Department and the programs were implemented abroad through USIA or USIS at various posts. So the actual place where I would have been employed if they would have accepted to transfer me to Washington after a difficult two-year tour in Korea would have been within State Department. And they were going through a RIF at that time. Reduction in force and there weren't positions available. So I had to purely resign.

But because some of the people that I had worked with wanted my experience, I immediately submitted an application and it took - I'm not sure how long - a few months perhaps, which was important because my husband only had another year and a half in Washington, a three-year Washington tour. But I was re-employed by the Department of State in the Office of Public Affairs. And I was on the Secretariat of the U.S. Advisory Commission on Educational Exchange and

Q: But you were Civil Service at that point?

BARBIS: Yes. And Advisory Committee on the Arts, Civil Service. And worked there a year and a half and had to resign again from the State Department in order to accompany my husband overseas. He was being sent as the American Consul in Chiangmai, Thailand.

Q: I see. I gather that your husband didn't get one of these telegrams, did he?

BARBIS: No, no, he was perfectly all right. However, the way it worked for the men if they had the audacity to fall in love with a foreign-born woman, that is a non-American, they had to offer their resignation. And a very good friend of mine married a Canadian woman and even so, she had to become an American citizen and he had to offer his resignation. Though if she became a citizen, they did not accept the man's resignation. It made life very difficult then to be married and sort of raise a family and develop a normal life existence. Now I notice in later times it's more of a problem if you don't marry and you want to take someone to post that you are not married to.

Q: Yes, I see. A different kind of problem. So you didn't really speak to Mr. Cox about this telegram did you?

BARBIS: I think that might have arrived on the day I was leaving on my honeymoon because I was married on August 22nd, or maybe it was when I came back because I see it's dated August 27th. And we had to go to California and meet my husband's family that I had not met yet. So, yes I did, and then I was just put through this whole process of officially resigning. But I think I had to say I was, if not a water-walker, I was very much marked. The reason they kept me for three months - at the time the Director of USIA was Arthur Larson and they had me in his office for three months between assignments. I was surprised that someone that was marked as very capable and committed and so forth could be so expendable.

Q: What was your husband's reaction to this at the time?

BARBIS: Well I think he felt that those were the rules. That you weren't available for world-wide assignment, meaning if he were assigned back to the Far East and I was sent to Africa, we wouldn't be together, so obviously that was the choice. And though he's always been very open-minded, through the years, at different times had women bosses which was no problem to him, it seems that at that snapshot of time, we accepted this which kind of stuns me now when I look back on it.

Q: It seems like that's how I feel. I was wondering how you two sit down and talk about this and say, "Well, this is it."

BARBIS: As I recall, we also were a bit brainwashed in the idea that - this may sound funny looking back over such a period of time - but you know you thought it was if not noble, at least a very worthy following to be in Foreign Service as a couple. And I think my husband ended up having thirty-seven years in the Foreign Service and just retired a couple of years ago. I think we felt that we did more things together. I shared more of his professional life. We made a bigger contribution than one might have made in the corporate world or the academic world. And so you were - I say that lightly, that we were brainwashed, but we thought we were doing good work. The world's work, you know, and it was probably was idealistic and a bit naive.

Q: How many other women do you suppose experienced this similar situation?

BARBIS: I've never met another one that had a telegram like that. I suppose there must have been some and I've been quite active in the Foreign Service and served on three continents and I really don't personally know of another incidence.

Q: Very interesting. That's amazing that something like this could have happened. Well I thought perhaps we could talk a little bit - you started to. You had been an officer for a couple of years before you continued in the Foreign Service with your husband as his spouse. Perhaps you can comment on the statuses between the spouse and officer?

BARBIS: I think probably We went on then and served in Chiangmai, Thailand which was a very small post and I think perhaps in my heart of hearts I did not think of myself solely as a spouse. I was energetic, educated. We went sort of as a couple. My husband depended upon me to organize and to do a lot of things and this was not only our social life, but I remember at one time when we were in Chiangmai.

U. Alexis Johnson was the Ambassador in Thailand and the King and Queen of Thailand, who are the current King and Queen, came for an official visit and there were some major logistical problems at the airport there at the time. You had to come in in daylight. You had a certain number of hours at midday. There were no lights for the field so you couldn't be delayed and take off late and so forth. So the Ambassador and his wife came up at the time of the visit of the King and Queen and we organized at the American Consulate a large reception and so forth and had many, many people. I knew in Thai the name of every single person who came through the receiving line. And I remember Ambassador Johnson being really rather amazed at that.

But it was very much a partnership. I felt just as responsible for knowing those people, what they might be doing. I also of course gave English classes. I gave them to the top leaders in the community, the mayor's wife, the commanding general's wife, the justice's wife, and so I took it as my responsibility to get to know people and to have them know us and it seemed like a job. I just wasn't being paid for it.

Q: So it seems like your training as an officer from the USIA probably helped you a lot in. . . .

BARBIS: Yes, I organized some cultural things. I worked with the young girl that was a librarian. In that case we lived on a compound. The residence was an old-time palace. Northern Thailand used to be a separate kingdom and the U.S. leased for something very nominal - I think a dollar a year or something - this property. And what was actually the Consulate office I think had been the home of the king's concubines. It was very wonderful and historic and interesting.

In fact, a predecessor, a single, bachelor man, apparently had felt depressed so he had everything he could find inside the house painted white. And there were beautiful teak ceilings and panelings and doors and so forth. And we decided that one thing we would do was restore this house. The reason that the Thais made this very nominal leasing fee to the U.S. government was because they felt the property would be maintained better as an official residence and as a foreign diplomatic enclave. But they were very, very disturbed when we arrived at what they felt had been a desecration of this property.

And actually I found Chinese contractors who came. We couldn't speak to each other, but I had worked for architects before I had gone into the Foreign Service so I had a great deal of interest. Also installed the first bathtub in Chiangmai and the first electric stove. In fact we had students from the home economics class come to see this stove. Of course we kept the charcoal pots in one corner, but we did have the other more modern things. And they had to blister burn the paint off these teak walls and I had a very nervous moment when the floor of my bedroom got hotter and hotter as they were burning the paint off the ceiling of the dining room underneath, but in the end it all worked and it was beautiful. We got a lot of credit for restoring this property.

Q: What was your observation in general at any post of the relationship between spouses and officers?

BARBIS: Well, it's like anything else in life. It varied with the individuals you were involved in. My husband's father died of leukemia in California and he went home to the funeral and at that time they were not reimbursing people for that kind of leave and it was before jets. It would have been very, very expensive for me to go back to the United States. So I stayed. They didn't quite ask me to move out of the residence where I lived, but they sent a substitute officer for my husband up for the period of time that he was gone for his father's funeral. And that officer treated me very badly I must say, and not with any kind of respect. Not even the humane aspect that you were going through a personal family loss that was earlier than it should have been. You know that kind of thing. And he also turned out to be not very careful about drinking and I was really quite incensed. I thought the United States would have been better represented to have no one than to have someone of that caliber, but he had the only authority as an officer.

Q: This was in Chiangmai?

BARBIS: Yes. But I give that as a little example and that sometimes happened other times. I think until I don't know how recently, but whenever your husband was away, no matter what you had done at post - you'd been totally loyal, you'd been working for the U.S. government effectively, certainly without any recompense, you could not cash a check at the Budget and Fiscal Office at an embassy. You had no identification as such. It was fine to use you for all sorts of labors, but you were not entitled, so if your husband left unexpectedly for a funeral or something. . . .

Q: Really!

BARBIS: No, for years you could not. I think it's really not been very many years that you could do that. And that means that you were left at post unless you could ask to borrow money from someone and this happened to me two or three times because then very shortly after this my husband's brother died of a brain tumor at 26 so he had to leave post again and it was very unexpected. I think his father was already ill with leukemia and so his mother certainly needed him. And it happened so suddenly I was left without cash and funds and I couldn't cash a check even though the Embassy certainly knew where I was, they'd shipped me there. And they were paying him a new. . . . But it was just one of those things. We were non-entities. We didn't exist in a sense officially.

Q: So when your husband wasn't present with you, you were. . .

BARBIS: Nobody. That part is really true. I don't know why we accepted it. I guess in the beginning you're young and the government seems huge and all-knowing and so forth, but when I think about it now it was quite remarkable. And later when we talk about Greece, I had a very similar experience in Greece - and that was only ten years ago - I still could not write a check.

Q: Let's move on to Greece and tell me about what happened there. You mentioned that those were not the best five years in the Foreign Service.

BARBIS: Well after serving in Asia, we came back and had an extended tour here in Washington, but by that time I was doing a six-year tour. In fact, we bought this house and lived there and both children were born there. And then we went abroad to Europe because my husband had had a medical situation and was not cleared to go to some isolated places without medical facilities. And he went as Consul General to Bordeaux and then to the European communities in Brussels and then we were sent to Athens, Greece. And ended up staying there almost five years and that was twelve years abroad in a row so the Greece assignment was at the end of already an extended period abroad.

We were sent to Greece about five months - we arrived January, '75 - about five months after Cyprus. And it was a very anti-American period. And as it happened, my husband was born in California but was of Greek origin. And by chance his mother had taken him on a visit to Greece when he was nine years old and they were caught there under the German Occupation. He was there until he was fifteen or sixteen years old. He spoke Greek from that era as a child. He had never had any training in the State Department and they decided to send him to Greece to see whether. . . . He had a reading and writing knowledge of Greek, ancient Greek, modern Greek and for that very same reason, because he tested so fluent in Greek, they did not give me lessons in Greek at all. Whereas two young men who were assigned to work for him. One had nine or ten months and the other had five months and both of their wives were in the same classes at FSI. But they would not find a place for me to study Greek since my husband did not need any Greek lessons. That was kind of too bad I think.

But I did go to a Greek church over on 16th Street and took some lessons on my own, but of course it's a much too difficult language. I had also learned some Siamese, spoken Siamese to a degree, and Korean, each of which are very different alphabets and systems of writing and languages not used anywhere else. So I learned enough Greek on my own to manage, but I decided and did a master's degree in Greek history and archaeology while I was there because I thought that understanding of the culture and the history would stay with me longer and I would use more than the language.

And probably one of the most difficult things that happened during that tour in Greece was a few months after we arrived, the Station Chief, Dick Welch, was assassinated. And he had gone to Connecticut College and I believe his father was professor of classical studies and my husband had already gotten acquainted with him although my husband was Chief of the Political Action. He tested, next to my husband I believe, the strongest in Greek, and certainly for a person without Greek background, he was exceptionally good at the language and had an interest in the country and had served in Cyprus. I don't think any of us ever knew the full story and if the U.S. government knows, they never told the rest of us exactly why or who assassinated him.

But we were all at Ambassador - Jack Kubisch was the Ambassador then - and we were all invited to a Christmas party on December 23rd at their house, and because they had young people in college who were home for the Christmas holidays, they invited different members in the Embassy to bring their children. We had a son who was twelve. He had to borrow a suit from my husband to wear that night which is a size 42, so he was a very tall, mature young boy. In fact, he spent the evening at the party talking with the daughters of the Korean Ambassador and they were in their twenties - 26 or something. And I heard them say at the door, "Oh we do want to see you again." And I said, "I'm not going to tell this young lady that she's been talking to a 12-year old all evening!" So we were all mixing. There were lots of people from the diplomatic community and from the Greek community and it was a wonderful evening.

We left to go home and as we went into our house, the phone was ringing and I heard my husband say, "Has he been shot?" And of course we had our twelve-year old with us. We had a ten-year old daughter whom we left at home. And because my husband was fluent in Greek, they asked him to go to the hospital. The Welches had come also. His wife was German. We knew her slightly but she had not mixed very much with the wives in the community. It probably was not her style and so forth.

Q: Do you remember her name?

BARBIS: I will. I can't right now. But they lived really just a few blocks from us and when they arrived home, someone was waiting for them and then shot out the streetlights. And they shot him and he was taken to this hospital they called The Pentagon. So my husband and I, without thinking, jumped back into the car and left, leaving our twelve-year old son just standing there, telling him to go bed. We did not have live-in help, and we went to the hospital.

As we arrived at the hospital, they asked me if I would go and see her and tell her that her husband had died. I thought that was a very difficult thing to do to someone I hardly knew. And unfortunately it was a nice party and we were in long formal clothes and I was still wearing a red velvet dress that I was still stuck in for the whole evening, which was certainly startling in this hospital. And I felt, once I realized, quite uncomfortable about it. But I said, "I will go in."

And meanwhile my husband went to make arrangements to have Mr. Welch's body moved to the Air Force morgue and speak Greek and so forth. Apparently the chauffeur had fainted dead away and collapsed and was in the hospital because he could have been shot, too. And I don't take that from him, but we had gone in a little car, a second car that I drove. A little yellow car. And when I went into see Mrs. Welch, she said, "I know he's dead. I had done some nursing. I saw him when he hit the street." There was no chance of pretending that her husband was not dead. They wanted me to take her home.

I said to the chauffeur, "Could I take her home in our car?" I hadn't been there very long, certainly did not read Greek street signs. Fortunately this hospital was in the general area where I had taken our children horseback riding. It was by now midnight probably or later, and I thought perhaps I could get home. And so Mrs. Welch and I went out and got into this little Vega station wagon and by the time we got back to the residential area where we both lived, the police were there and the street was boarded off. Again, I had not studied very much Greek but I managed to say in Greek, "She lives here." and they let us through.

They had already drawn the diagram on the street where his body had been and when we went up to her door, she had his watch in her hand and house keys, both covered with his blood. And I couldn't help thinking then and many times after, that all of us in Foreign Service go out to these official receptions and parties and one night, all you have left of your husband is his watch and one set of house keys. It was a vision that I really haven't been able to forget even though it's been some eighteen years.

But anyway, they had an Arab houseboy and he appeared, and we asked for something to drink. Mr. Welch also had his elderly father who I believe had some kind of brain surgery and he was asleep upstairs, and so we decided we didn't want to shock or upset him.

So I decided I'd better call in the Embassy and tell them where we were, because after all, we had just gone out on the street, and whether we got where we were going. . . . So I called and a long-time employee of the Embassy - a local - was on the switchboard, and he said, "Oh Mrs. Barbis, where have you been, where have you been? Your son has been calling. He's very frightened." And I said, "Oh my goodness, I totally forgot that I had left the children alone." I called and he said, "You know I can't wake up Dina," (his sister) and the dog is there. And I encouraged them to just get together in one room and that I would come as soon as I could, but that everything was all right and to be as calm as possible. And I think he handled it quite well, but it has to be a traumatic experience also for a ten-year old and a twelve-year old.

Then I called the Embassy doctor who - I guess I knew by that time that he was what we called a "spook." He was a regional medical doctor and he traveled around to posts in the Mediterranean and he had been away and had just gotten back. As soon as I told him that I was there and that I didn't know when she might lose control or break down or whatever - I didn't know her well - but had had a terrible shock.

Q: You mean Mrs. Welch?

BARBIS: Mrs. Welch. I felt that she should have some medical attention. And I was not a close friend. Anyway, the DCM lived a couple of blocks away, but nobody knew what this was at the time and they thought it was a conspiracy so the Ambassador and the DCM went and stayed inside the Embassy with the Marine guards and so forth. Because Greece had had at an earlier period - I guess when the Junta took over - I've heard stories of how - you know the Ambassador and there was no communications and there were all sorts of problems. So this time - I didn't know about it, but there must have been some sort of a plan. The other officers went.

It seems that my husband and I were the two that were roaming around town trying to be the do-gooders or whatever even to the point of having left our own children a little bit in the lurch to offer some assistance. Anyway, my car was parked outside the door that night. No one ever came to be with her. The doctor certainly didn't. He practically hung up on me. He wanted nothing to do with it and no one else.

So I did call the DCM's wife. She had live-in help and she did come down and spent part of the night so that I could go home to my children who didn't have anyone. And the next day of course was Christmas Eve and I think it was two days after that that someone finally came from CIA and they took her and said she was ill and put her on a plane and took her to Naples without having an opportunity to say goodbye to anyone. I didn't like the way it was handled at all.

And furthermore they put the picture of our car with the license plate in the newspaper and said that my husband was the CIA Station Chief. And we stayed another three and a half years. He was under a death threat the entire time. Not that that was unique in the only place in the world, but we had policemen with guns around the clock inside our garden.

Q: He was actually named Station Chief?

BARBIS: Oh yes, and they showed a picture of the back of his head at a meeting with the Ambassador. They raised the question of denying it. I have since in later life worked in public affairs and media work and there is an argument on that side saying if you deny something, it just makes the story bigger because it draws attention. And so they made the decision not to deny it. Then we asked whether we should be transferred after two years or so. By this time we also then went into a period of eight months in which they did not permit the U.S. Ambassador to come and it was a very, very anti-American period.

And they said, "No, that my husband was uniquely qualified to be there at that time and to understand what was going on." He may have been the only one other than locals who could read the newspapers in Greek, and that he was necessary. In fact we were there for three and a half years without even home leave. And then had a brief home leave and went back. And by this time, we did feel that you couldn't go for a picnic on Sunday without an armed bodyguard. And I know there are other places in the world. I'm not saying at all that our situation was unique.

They did come and want to put bars on all the windows and I said, "No." I thought that I could stay there and I could continue doing what we were doing, but I did not want to look out my dining room window everyday and see bars as though I was in prison. So the Embassy Administrative Officer made me sign a paper saying that if we were attacked or anything happened, that it was my responsibility because I wouldn't let them put iron bars on the windows.

Q: Would they want to live in a house with bars around?

BARBIS: There are some places in the world where I believe there is just enough normal burglaries that you do have artistic wrought-iron bars, but I felt I could handle all the other parts of it, but in fact when my husband finally did leave - he was rushed back to an assignment in Washington and so he left before the children and myself, and I was left to sell this infamous little yellow Vega and the Embassy did not help me at all. Because we associated so much with Greeks, I had a certain speaking knowledge, although I certainly wouldn't lecture in Greek or any of the rest of that, but I had to go, as difficult as it is in that kind of a country - I had to go down and clear this car through customs myself.

And I found other people - locals there from the administrative offices saying, "Mrs. Barbis, what are you doing here by yourself?" And I said, "Well, I was left to do this again because my husband left post to come to assignment back to Washington, DC." It was like I didn't exist.

Q: So you couldn't ask somebody to do it. It had to go through your husband?

BARBIS: Yes, and I think we probably gave as much of ourselves in a Foreign Service situation as any family could do, and at the very end were not supported by the Embassy. And that of course comes from the person who is Ambassador at the time. And I did not even have the phone call from Ambassador's wife. Oh, I had one phone call in which her social secretary - in these two weeks that we were finishing up after my husband left.

In addition, I must say, the day my husband left, they had begun packing our things. Of course we were in a furnished Embassy residence and had left the basic furnishings in storage in Belgium. But we had all the kind of possessions that you had with you - we'd been there nearly five years by that time - and they set fire to the warehouse. Our things were taken to the warehouse waiting trans-Atlantic shipment. Fifty people had their things stored in the warehouse. The actual Station Chief had his things in there and ourselves. The fire was started where our things were and three people out of fifty lost everything. We did and the two people who were unlucky enough to have their possessions parked on either side of ours. The actual Station Chief did not lose anything.

Through those years people told me, "Don't worry about your husband being assassinated. Don't worry about your children being kidnapped. Fanatics know who is the real Station Chief. And they will know that your husband is not the real one." Whoever set the fire apparently did not know and. . .

Q: Do you think they were targeted at you?

BARBIS: Well what would you think? If fifty people were in a warehouse and it was started at four o'clock the actual day - a Saturday afternoon - and no one called us. The packers came back to finish packing some other things on the Monday. And we packed all day and late in the afternoon, the actual Station Chief called me said, "I'm so sorry." Well I guess my son took the phone call and he said, "I am so sorry to hear that your effects have burned." That was the first that we knew. And this teen-aged boy - I guess not quite seventeen - was so upset, he picked up a lamp and he threw it down in the bathroom which had a marble floor, and he ran out of the house barefoot. And I had some time finding him, and in the meantime, the Administrative Officer called and said, "Oh Mrs. Barbis, we didn't tell you that your effects were all burned on Saturday."

And what had happened is the Station Chief, he at least had the decency when he learned that we didn't even know that our things had been burned up and the packers were coming back and packing some more to take back to this same warehouse, he called the Administrative Officer. Again, my husband was not at post. And what did anyone care that we had a major fire? And then the Administrative Officer called and said, "I'm so sorry." I said, "I want to go and see if everything really is destroyed, if there's nothing that we can salvage." And I was very upset.

He must have called the Embassy medical doctor who was a different man now. My children had allergies and had allergy shots twice a week, so we knew the doctor. And he came to visit me, I guess to see whether I was altogether or just what. I told the Administrative Officer, "You can get these packers out of here. I think I can handle most of this. But I just can't play this game that they come and pack, take it away, burn it, come and pack, take it away." I just did not want to play that game . . . [End Tape I, Side A; Beginning Tape I, Side B]

Q: Well we were talking about the fire still.

BARBIS: Well I was just saying the Embassy doctor came and I said, "Look, I'm all right. I can handle this. It's a little difficult with my husband not here. He's starting a new job and I'm not going to call him immediately. But my son. We've called everyone we know. And he got so upset and enraged that he ran out of the house. He has no money. He didn't have shoes on. I don't think he can go very far, but I'm very concerned about him." So I must say the doctor did drive around the neighborhood and did find Michael on the street and talked to him and said to him - I think he used quite good judgement and said, "Please at least call your mother. If you still need some time to walk around and let off steam and so forth, it's understandable, but please call your mother." So he did.

But I have to say that I am still traumatized by those experiences and certainly two young teenagers have to be without their father at post, having gone back to the United States to do a job for the U.S. government. I felt then and I feel now that my government did not support us very well at all. And it certainly affected. . . . When we came back, I had the right of reinstatement in USIA. And I looked into it and they say, "Now things have changed. We've met our quotas and we have lots of women professionals and we would need you to go overseas." I said, "I've been gone twelve years in a row which is a long time and before that had four to five years overseas in Asia. Proportionately that's a very large part of our Foreign Service life. My husband has just been assigned back here and I can't just turn around and go immediately overseas again." And we didn't get down to this, that, or accept this offer or nothing.

And I looked around and found that I could probably do very well to work in public relations which I did, starting with the third largest PR firm in the world in their international affairs division and worked ten years. So I didn't go any further in invoking my rights of reinstatement.

Q: But you were quite disappointed, though, weren't you?

BARBIS: Yes. I guess now that we're talking about it. I guess the thing in looking back at it is they sold us on this idea that we were a unit and we worked as a unit and we made contributions I think, representing the United States. That couldn't be factored in, that I had really been doing. . . In fact, it was sort of in some ways a no win situation. Then I got into working with Marlene Eagleburger whose husband was at the time Under Secretary for Political Affairs and we worked in the area of taxes, we worked in the areas of employment, we worked in the areas of spouse compensation, to try to make life better for family members in the Foreign Service. I think I was motivated to do that because I felt that the Foreign Service had let us down.

And the other side of the coin. Marlene and I were interviewed by CNN and I was here. By that time, he had retired from the Foreign Service, so she was interviewed in New York and the anchor was in Atlanta. He said, "How did you get the job you have now and what are you doing?" and I said, "I am working now for a very major international public affairs agency and I am doing many of the same thing that I did in Foreign Service as a spouse, only now I am being paid to do these things."

And during this ten years that I was working and had various responsibilities, and the last was vice president in international affairs for Hill, Knowlton, Public Affairs World Wide. Different times in the last six months I arranged the visit of the Foreign Minister and the second visit of the President of Macedonia who were here trying to become recognized. I made appointments for them. By this time, Mr. Eagleburger was back as Deputy Secretary of State. I was seated at the table in the State Department on the side next to the President of Macedonia representing them with my former colleagues of the State Department, Mr. Eagleburger, and his immediate senior colleagues across the table. I was doing that kind of work. I also arranged for the President of Macedonia to meet with Mr. Scowcroft at the White House.

And some of my colleagues in the public affairs agency were saying, "Well you were twenty years as a spouse. You were not working. How do you know how to do these things?" Because then, in the private sector, I was applying many of the skills, knowledge, experience in dealing with people, with foreign officials, I had been doing serving in the Foreign Service as a spouse.

Q: For free.

BARBIS: For free. Exactly, for free. So both sides were saying, "How is it that you can do this?" It's a question of non-recognition. You know there used to be a cartoon - "Born thirty years too soon." Or too late, I forget which one. But I sort of feel like my timing was off.

Q: So when you were trying to get reinstated in 1979, what would you say was the climate for tandem couples at that time?

BARBIS: That was just a little bit before tandem couples. I don't remember the exact regulation part, but it was not nearly as accepted or prevalent. In fact during those first two or three years, when I first came back, I said, "I'm never ever going to volunteer or work for a women's group again. I've done it. I've made much more than anyone should be expected to contribute." But a good friend of mine from service in the Far East was coordinator of the Bookfair that year and she was in a very unfortunate accident. A garage door came down on her head and she was quite injured, and I was asked would I pick up the pieces and step in and be deputy coordinator for the Bookfair? And under those circumstances, I said, yes, of course I would.

And I did and so I also handled public relations. And that was first year I had a TV crew come and cover the Bookfair and just generated all kinds of. . . . We were getting the new - it must have been 1980 - the new Foreign Service Act of 1980, and I tied it in. The Bookfair, not just a bunch of little old ladies in tennis shoes offering books and so forth, but of the things that were happening in the Foreign Service and the impact of the Foreign Service Act which was under consideration on the Hill. And of course that's what you do with the media. You try to think like they think and tie it to something. And it just generated an amazing amount of publicity and good will for the Bookfair.

So through that route the next year I became vice president of the AAFSW and worked with Pat Ryan who was president that year. And she was very interested in legislative issues and hard issues also and things that could benefit family members in the Foreign Service, as was Marlene Eagleburger, and they had served in Brussels when we were there. And so the three of us put our heads together and Marlene actually called. . . . The FLO Office was very new then. In fact, Marilyn Holmes was the second Director of the FLO Office. And she was in that position at that time. And Marlene started having meetings in an ante-room of her husband's office when he was Under Secretary for Political Affairs and she took considerable leadership in this. Now when Holmes was involved, I was involved - I've forgotten some of the other people in that very early period.

And what it started out with is, is there not some way to compensate senior Foreign Service wives - we weren't saying spouses so much at that time because there were very few male spouses. Now we have more. But because they can't have another job, they're expected to do all these things. In fact on the CNN interview, the way it started out was, the anchor said, "What does an ambassador do if he does not have a wife?" And we responded, "He hires a social secretary or a person to handle all the things that his wife, if his has one, does for free. And the government will pay for that other person if there is not a spouse." And that's true today. That's still true.

And by that time there were beginning to be other instances like Ambassador Dubs who was assassinated in Afghanistan. He had been married over thirty years and had recently divorced and had married a younger woman that I believe was on the staff of one of the Senate committees. At any rate, she chose not to go to Afghanistan. And he was then unfortunately assassinated. And the entire Foreign Service pension went to this new wife who had not been to post at all. And the wife of some thirty years - and I've forgotten now whether they had four or five children or whatever - she was left destitute. And she actually was called in.

About this time all these things about divorced wives and getting a pension if you've served at least ten years. It was really our group under Pat Ryan and Marlene Eagleburger that germinated these ideas that we have to look out for ourselves. We're not eligible for social security. So if you don't, you put in all your time free for the government and you're out of your own country so you don't have any work history and no social security. You're as poor as anything. And you have been having considerable responsibility, because certainly an ambassador's wife or senior counselor's wives, DCM's wives, for the most part, are very responsible, well-educated people who, if they had been in any other endeavor, would in some way have been recognized or recompensed for the work they were doing.

And gradually society was changing in the United States so that a two-income family was becoming almost essential. If a Foreign Service family was going to have a mortgage and plan to educate their children, it was inevitable. And we made many arguments like that. In fact I helped them apply some of the public relations aspects. And with Marlene Eagleburger, what they now call "grassroots" and so forth, we called on every member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and every member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. And she could get the appointments and the entrée^{1/2} because she was recognized. And then some of the rest of us got statistics, worked out various regulations. We figured out how much it cost to recruit and train a young Foreign Service officer. And statistically, after about three tours or ten years service, maybe a tour here, a tour overseas, come back, young children just in school, and they begin to re-think whether they can take another tour in Foreign Service. And the costs were much higher than finding some way for spouses to work or to earn some sort of social security credits, or to make some monetary contribution to their own personal family. And that was the genesis of some of these ideas which later evolved into. . .

Actually the climate was not great in the United States. Remember in the early '80's under Reagan we were having all kinds of recession and so the idea that senior wives would be reimbursed in any way, that idea just simply could not go, although we did manage to get Senator Charles Mathias, from Maryland at the time, to introduce a bill providing for the Secretary of State to establish a pilot project to allow spouses to work. And we organized different committees and tried to flesh that out. And they even hired a former ambassador who had served someplace in South America - I can't remember his name for the moment, but I can find it, and there will be others who know. He was paid as a staff to start working out the details within the Department of this pilot project.

But in the end, it wasn't fully appropriated. So we had to go back to the drawing board, and it was - I'm not precise, but it was someplace in there approaching 1984 or so that the idea for the Foreign Service Associates. . . . We became aware that it had to be across the board for everyone. There was no way that you could sell the Congress just for senior wives. So they were certainly carrying the burden. So I think in a way a great deal of intelligence and ingenuity was shown through this decade of the 80's in looking for different approaches.

I also served for about three or four years as the AAFSW representative to the Board of the American Foreign Service. And I was sort of a token woman. You know through Bookfair, we raised funds for scholarships for Foreign Service children as does AFSA. But there were a couple of times there when they did not even give AAFSW credit and sometimes it was as much as \$60,000 that they were contributing toward scholarships! Pat Ryan started this I believe. Anyway, she did it for a while herself and I was by this time working downtown and so I went. And it was a weekly lunch meeting. We were just there all the time to remind them of AAFSW, to remind them of family interests, that we were not competing. That each one of them at that table - there might have been a few single people through the years - but for the most part they were family people and that their role in the Foreign Service was uniquely intertwined with the interests of their spouses and their children. You couldn't separate them all. So I think that helped, too.

And as I remember, one year I was asked - you know they have Foreign Service Day in May and they usually have a brunch at the Foreign Service Club - and I was asked to give a talk, an update on the issues and so forth. We just generated in every direction. And as you've seen from some of the publications, then we - Marlene Eagleburger and also Larry Eagleburger were on the Today Show, all the big morning shows, NPR, and then we had a very major article in the Sunday magazine of The Washington Post.

And even at that point then finally The Foreign Service Journal, the editor whom I knew at that time, said, "You know we want to do something about working spouses." This was in March of '85. And he said, "Do you think you could find and put together a typical group of working spouses to be featured on the cover?" That was awkward and as I told someone afterwards, if I had been doing this for a client, it would have cost a fair amount of money because we had one woman who is a foreign-born spouse. She was a PhD, doctor of nutrition at NIH, Indian-born. We had an educator who was a Black spouse of a USIA officer.

We had a male spouse, though we have five spouses represented on this cover and the male spouses in '85 were not 20 percent of the Foreign Service. But you couldn't cut him in half so. His wife was in Polish language training and I believe was going to Poland and he was going to be a stringer for The Washington Post. Of course a male spouse does not expect to go to post and not expect to have something to do.

And a young lady who was an attorney, and I remember talking to her because they were new in the Foreign Service, it was going to be their first foreign assignment. She actually had graduated from Harvard Law School. She was with a law firm specializing in environmental law, and she was asking me as a senior Foreign Service spouse, did I think she should go to post or did I think she should stay and do her post here? Of course it's very easy to give free advice, but we had also just finished a day's session that had been organized by Martin Herz at Georgetown University on working in the Foreign Service and there were many questions. And some of us said, "You know, the Department, or the government, can do as much as they can to make it an open environment, but in fact it's a decision of the couple going into the Foreign Service because there are some restrictions, particularly in the case of law or medicine. There are language requirements, there are licensing requirements. You can't move in those professions state to state within the United States without qualifying and being licensed, and that's even true in the accounting field. So you cannot expect that the U.S. government can promise you or can provide a position for you throughout your Foreign Service career. There are going to have to be some judgement calls and some decisions that the couple are going to have to make. Even the tandem couples defer to one's assignment or the other. It's going to make a difference in how their careers go and so forth."

So I told this young lawyer, I said, "Look, you're young, you don't have any children. Why don't you consider going to post and learning Russian? Obviously that would be no challenge for you. And who knows? Later on, a Russian-speaking environmental lawyer?" I was prescient. Look today with all the problems that we have found, going on to have a knowledge. .

I don't know if that's what she did or not, but it's that kind of attitude that I hope I still have a grip on. Give what you can in Foreign Service, take all the opportunities that you find there, and if they don't quite fit, just turn them around and maybe it will fit into your circumstances. And I hope that what she did is go to post and be with her husband and learn something about a new country.

Q: Mrs. Barbis, tell me a little bit about the 1980 Foreign Service Act and how that might have fit in with the kind of activities that you were involved with.

BARBIS: I can't remember all the details and that's something maybe I should have reviewed before talking to you, but certainly one of the provisions of it was for a pension for Foreign Service spouses. There were other people who worked on that much more closely than I did on that one ingredient of it, if you will. But it did get put in there and it evolved that if you have served in the Foreign Service as a spouse for, I believe, ten years overseas, and there was a certain date - I believe it was February of '81 or something - that it was effective. And then later there were efforts to do a bridge or something because if you happened to be divorced in January of that year, you were forever non-eligible. There were some inequities. And because of age, this came with retirement so there was a period in which they catch up with all the women who fit that exact category of their husbands having retired within a certain period and then become eligible for a pension. It wasn't that it went on forever.

Q: So it was basically on pensions?

BARBIS: No, no, there were a lot of factors of The Foreign Service Act, but that was the one that impacted on families, on spouses, that I can think of. A couple of other things that we did. Again, Pat Ryan, Marlene Eagleburger and I. You know, it used to be that you paid for babysitters, you paid for all the expenses of participating, and many times people were not reimbursed of course for their representation expenses. There were things we all know that you have to do that you could not get reimbursed for and it was just out-of-pocket, out-of-pocket, out-of-pocket. And so we looked into it and felt that they were legitimate. We'd all experienced them. That they were legitimate business deductions and that if we could have an IRS ruling, that they could be deducted.

And actually again Pat Ryan, Marlene and I, we fashioned some language, we got an appointment with the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Treasury. We went in and he talked with the IRS and so forth and got a ruling which was sent out to all posts - again that had to be very close to the mid-'80's - to enable people to deduct legitimate expenses. Now they had a responsibility to defend them in each instance if you were personally audited.

But there also - I guess that was what reminded me of it - there also was language in that Foreign Service Act, that if you have expenses that are expended in service of - and I believe they may have said representation - but by family members in service of the U.S. government - that they were valid expenses. I've forgotten the exact language. I have it some place. I could find it if it would be interesting for the historical record. But that - this was again part of the ingenuity - if we could not be reimbursed or recompensed for work that we were doing, the other way we could is, the expenses that were going out-of-pocket that were in the government's benefit and was out of our pocket. That if we could deduct those expenses and legitimately save on our taxes, that was another way of helping the Foreign Service family income. Because what you can save or keep is also as good as what you earn if you can't keep it!

Q: Right, right, of course. So what happened to the Foreign Service Associate Program? That never really was implemented, was it?

BARBIS: No. I think it was timing. We used to have weekly meetings at Sue Low's house and we had ourselves organized. Again I was on the public relations/public affairs, because as we all know, the way to get something. . . . The more we worked with Congress and got attention with Congress, the guys on the seventh floor in the State Department, the more they listened to us. And so that was our technique and a lot of the things that I had then learned that you do for big major corporate clients - I worked ten years for Eastman Kodak and Weyerhaeuser and IBM and several firms like that. And many of the things, when they needed to get legislation changed or needed to change policies or even regulations, you got to talking about it on radio and TV and you got it to your member of Congress and then your member of Congress talked to the Executive and you got some things changed. And so we worked the system, and I think intelligently.

But I think part of what we have to recognize about the Foreign Service Associates. It took on different names. You know, the career officers in AFSA were very threatened by this. It became very controversial because they felt that every spouse that took a job - that would be a Foreign Service officer who would not be able to do that job. What has actually happened is that a lot of positions that. . . .

Well, they learned at first in Eastern Europe as it became more difficult for housing and to clear people and so forth, they turned and looked at who they had at post. And there may be a spouse who was a trained economist. Anyway, qualified in several different ways. And they first began to employ spouses without the legislation, without the Act, without the Foreign Service Associates program per se. They found that there were things without legislation that they could do by fiat, if you would. And they started hiring spouses. And the world didn't come to an end. They were competent. And in fact, spouses that are in an isolated environment. . . . We're all healthier when we're busy and involved and feel that we're making a serious contribution.

And so there were all these bonuses of doing this. And that gradually seeped out. And I think what's happened is that even without. . . . You know data banks have been set up and also FLO negotiated agreements because the paper work is always there. You get a work permit depending. And so by negotiating some bilateral agreements with different countries, we'll let your spouses work here.

Oh, we also had meetings with various diplomatic wives here in Washington and learned. I didn't have a copy of it, but there was another article in The Washington Post about how many of the other countries have let - we always think the Americans are way in advance of so many things. On this one we have been dragging our feet behind many. . . . I mean there have been Foreign Service officers, tandem couples, Japanese Service, Scandinavian countries. Several other countries way before ourselves. So we compared notes with them. And I think it's a classic example of, you know, get up and help yourself. And that's what was important.

And the majority, really the majority of women in this effort were Department of State. But we did everything in the names of the mission. All the agencies of the U.S. government that were eligible in a foreign mission. So it included AID, the Foreign Agricultural Service, if you will. Even CIA. And I, because my husband's last assignments were as political counselor to the Secretary of the Army and he was at the Pentagon for a few years, I became acquainted with what they were doing for military wives. And they were patterning much of what they were doing. . . . They have more assignments, of course, in the United States and there were more opportunities for military wives, although perhaps they moved more often. But they could get more jobs and have continuity, say, in the social security history which was impossible for Foreign Service wives for the most part.

But I think we started a little bonfire that has reached out into many areas and has impacted favorably on many families that have devoted their entire careers to serving the U.S. government.

Q: Yes, yes, that definitely is true. I think perhaps the PIT [part-time, intermittent, temporary] positions now . . .

BARBIS: Yes, many of the things that FLO was doing. Now that needs to be improved upon and it's not only the language. I read recently that they had re-named that. PIT - Part-interim-time or something but, in English anyway, to have a "pit" job, I mean the pits is the pits and they've got to get rid of that phraseology! But I think there have been a lot of changes like that. In ten years there's more recognition that our society. . . .

If we're going to be truly representative of American society, we cannot pretend that this need does not exist for people on salaries, not entrepreneurs, but people on salaries who want to offer their children the opportunities that you have in the United States, opportunities for a better education. We served in France and Belgium and if the children can pass the exams, they go to university at almost no charge, whereas in the United States, it's extraordinarily expensive. And that's something that has to be factored in. That some people in the diplomatic services of some of these other foreign countries do not have to face that several thousands of dollars for a good university education.

Q: Even at the high school level, or lower. You get a lot of boarding school. . . .

BARBIS: That I did not mention. Finally it seemed to us just too much to ask young adolescents to cope with, as I was saying in Greece, all the guns and the armed guards and all of these factors and there was such a to-do. Every morning my husband was supposed to go to work in a different way and we had to be careful about the phones and so many things.

And we did finally - and we are Westerners. I'm from Seattle, my husband is from San Francisco, so we had no exposure to the eastern boarding schools, but we did send both of our children back to Choate/Rosemary Hall in Connecticut. And their grandmothers were in Seattle and San Francisco so they had no family members nearby and it was at our own expense, but it was a commitment and a decision that we decided to make which I do not regret because I think they had a more normal adolescence than they would have at that time had at post in Athens, Greece.

Q: Giving them a little bit more stability.

BARBIS: Plus they had been three and five when they went out of the United States, and twelve years in my lifetime may not be so long, but twelve years for a three-year old and a five-year old. . . They're really missing their whole American growing up experience.

Q: I wanted to go back and clear up one point. You mentioned in Athens that you were without an embassy for eight months?

BARBIS: Without an ambassador.

Q: Without an ambassador. Okay, I see.

BARBIS: Because Ambassador Kubisch rotated and the relations between the U.S. and Greece were so exacerbated that - I'm trying to remember the name of the ambassador. He had served in Africa. He later went to Poland. In his confirmation hearings, there was some discussion about the islands off the coast of Turkey and the continental shelf. Either they jumped on it or they used it as an excuse that it implied that these islands belonged to Turkey rather than to Greece and they refused to accept him as an ambassador. And so we went on eight months without an ambassador.

Also at that time, out of the top five people in the Embassy, I was the only spouse of a consular at post so the responsibility of. . . . Yes. One wife came to post, turned around and left, the DCM was not married, or he was divorced. I can't remember the other details but a lot of the morale and good will and sort of taking care, the responsibility. . . . At least I took the responsibility to try to help people.

And different times we'd get announcements. "Stay in your compound" and things like that and it was a disturbing time. We had Greek guests last night from Greece and I'm happy to say they said, "It's wonderful. Come visit." We're planning a visit next summer.

Q: To Greece! Well come see us. My husband and I are going to be there, so we would love to see you there. There was something else here. Oh yes. Tell me about the cello.

BARBIS: The which?

Q: The cello?

BARBIS: Oh well I must say, you'll probably be asked during your Foreign Service life was there any post that was your favorite. It seemed to me people that I met through the years there was something about your first post. I don't know whether you put more of yourself into it or everything is so unique and new. Or maybe it's because I enjoyed working in my own name in the Embassy there, but as the assistant in Cultural Affairs, I was responsible both for educational exchange and for cultural performances.

And one time we had Gregor Piatigorsky who was a world-renowned cellist who came to play. Their roads were not paved. It was not very long after the Korean War and the only auditorium that could hold him - and of course the Koreans love music and Western classical music - was at this Ewon Women's University which held 4,000 people.

We didn't have extra cars or cars and drivers and things like that at the Embassy, and I guess I was the only girl there who had a car. I was there a short time and I couldn't stand not being able to get around and I ordered a Chevrolet and I remember it was Neptune green. It came and the very few cars that were in Korea were all black, let me tell you. This was a rather jazzy car and I put Mr. Piatigorsky in and he had a Stradivarius cello in the car and drove over these bumpy, terrible roads to this women's university. And he sat on the stage with no accompaniment. You could hear a pin drop. It was one of the experiences I will never forget. But I thought, what if we hit a pothole? Pothole! There's holes all over the road. And what if something happens and I have such valuable cargo here? But they said it would be an interesting life and it's certainly true. You are asked to do all kinds of other things.

In the reminiscent stage, the other thing I remember. . . Certainly that night of the assassination is one that most of us don't want to remember from the Foreign Service experience, but the other one was in Chiangmai, Thailand where my husband was the American Consul. Well it's true in Greece and so I'm less certain about the cultures, but certainly in, and maybe it is in a hot climate, the tradition has grown and they bury their dead within twenty-four hours. Not three days as we tend to do in western societies and so forth. But in Thailand, Chiangmai of course was the second largest city in Thailand and was north very near the southern Hunan border of China.

So we were invited to this funeral and I guess either the local staff didn't want to tell us or thought we'd find out soon enough or whatever, it was a funeral pyre. The body was put on this big built-up of wood and sticks and so forth and the respectful thing to do was to light the fire and to start the body burning. And my husband, as the American Consul, was given this very respectful position and I had to go right behind him and put this lighted - well it wasn't a candle, but like a piece of wood already lit - and to start the fire. And then you stood in respectful silence and you could hear the bones cracking. It was truly an experience and I thought, "I'm going to do everything for our government!" (laughs)

Q: Wow! That's pretty interesting. I'm looking here. Mrs. Barbis, I'd like to know a little bit more about this Leadership America Program that you are involved with. You were selected as leader I guess.

BARBIS: Yes, and I was in the inaugural class in 1988. It grew out of Leadership Texas which started some time in the last ten years when they realized that the actual role that women had performed in the history of developing the state of Texas had not been recorded anywhere and a group of women got together, doing in a way much the same sort of things I've been describing that we did for ourselves to improve our situations in the Foreign Service.

And they decided that there needed to be more recognition. And they developed this study program, three sessions a year. And they would study different things about the state of Texas, either the economy or the environment, or the history. And they would select a certain number of women each year and they would go back into their communities and do more, and at the same time work and try to get more women appointed to boards and commissions. And I think that developed in getting Ann Richards, who is one of the originators of this, elected Governor of Texas.

The person who had been the Executive Director was transferred - same way as Foreign Service - her husband was a minister and he was transferred to a church in Alexandria, Virginia. And they had been thinking about going national. And she moved to Washington, DC, she decided to establish an office there and take it national and they selected a hundred women leaders from throughout the United States. One reason that I applied and was interested was because I had been abroad so many years I did not feel I really knew what women were thinking about all over the United States. And they selected women who were state senators and mayors of small communities, who were corporate executives, and I'm still on the steering committee and involved in helping with the selections and I have connected it with the State Department, and Mr. Eagleburger has received the group each year for the last four years and we've given them foreign policy briefings. And I thought it was just an extension of getting to know my own country better. And so now I have friends and acquaintances and I've done it both for professional assistance and right now I'm working on the transition committee. I'm chairing a task force on the arts and humanities for getting more women appointed to the new Clinton administration.

Q: I'm glad to know that there's wonderful things to look forward to in the Foreign Service and the many years that you spent overseas obviously have good things and bad things, but still. . . .

BARBIS: I think it's a question of. . . . That's another thing. I was working. First they used to say, "Well you can't hire anyone from the Foreign Service spouses because they can only be there two years or three years." Well any employer that has a guarantee of a wonderful, ingenious, adaptable, flexible person has a wonderful employee. No one can guarantee that you can be there two or three years. In fact it's an advantage.

And I used to give some talks through FSI to Foreign Service spouses about their opportunities in the private sector and many times I said, "I think you are underestimating abilities. You don't realize how much you have learned. . ." [End Tape I, Side B]

BIOGRAPHIC DATA

Spouse: George Milton Barbis

Spouse's Position: Consul General; Chief, Political Section

Spouse Entered Service: 9/25/51 Left Service: 4/1/89 You Entered Service: 1/55 Left Service: Same

Status: Former junior cultural affairs officer (USIA); former civil service (State Dept/IES);
Spouse of retiree

Mrs. Barbis as officer:1955-57Seoul, Korea

Place/Date of birth: Sioux City, Iowa; August 11

Maiden Name: Quinn

Parents (Name, Profession):

Forrest W. Davis, State Auditor & CPA, State of Washington

Georgia B. Davis, Telephone Operator, AT&T

Schools (Prep, University):

Ainsworth High School, Ainsworth, Nebraska

BA International Relations/Political Science, University of Washington, Seattle

MA History, LaVerne University, Athens, Greece (thesis pending)

Profession: Public relations executive

Date/Place of Marriage: Seattle Washington; August 22, 1957

Children:

Michael, b. 1962. Washington, DC - Investment banker, NYC

Dina, b. 1964, Wash., D.C. - Equine vet; PhD candidate, Cornell

Positions held (Please specify Volunteer or Paid):At Post: Volunteer - Vice President,
American Women's Organization, Athens (1975-79); Rep. to Federation of American Women's
Clubs Overseas (FAWCO) 1977-79; AWO Liaison to Women's International. Club of Greece
(1977-79). Paid - Cultural Affairs Assistant, Educational Exchange and cultural presentations

B. In Washington, DC: Volunteer - (See attached bio); Vice President and Editorial Board, AAFSW (1980-86); Coordinator and Publicity Chair, AAFSW Bookfair (1980); AAFSW Rep, Board of Governors AFSA (1982-86); Vice chair, Leader Foundation (1986-88);. Paid - 10 years as Public Relations Executive, Hill, Knowlton and Carl Byoir Assoc; State Department, Bureau of Public Affairs; USIA Cultural Affairs, Secretary and Junior Officer

Honors (Scholastic, FS): High school valedictorian; University of Washington Phi Beta Kappa (junior year); BA cum laude

End of interview